

Tips for Writing an Effective Press Release

- ☐ Use an attention-grabber headline.
- ☐ Answer the five W's in the first paragraph (Who, What, When, Where and Why).

This is a standard rule in journalism. Any editor or reporter should understand the basic and most important facts after reading just the first few sentences.

- ☐ Only include solid facts. Be specific and detailed.

You do not want the press to explain the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program to the community. The chance of creating a misunderstanding is too great. You do, however, want the press to inform the public about your goal, and to entice people to attend your meetings and support your project. Include enough information about property acquisition projects to raise people's interests. Also, emphasize that the program is voluntary so that no undue anger is roused.

- ☐ Be active and to the point.

Use language that will interest and excite readers. This will encourage them to look forward to the project as a way to solve the flooding problem in your community.

- ☐ Keep your press release to two pages or less.

Keep it short and informative. If you cannot fit everything on two pages, you are not being direct. Also remember that journalists are notoriously busy. They probably will not have time to read more than this anyway.

- ☐ End a press release with —30— or #### typed across the bottom center of the last page.

If the release is continued on another page, type “—more—” at the bottom of every page except the last one.

- ☐ Use standard 8 ½" x 11" paper.

Only type on one side of the page. Leave a margin of approximately 1 ½" on all sides. Never break a paragraph across two pages.

Tool II-9, Press Release Tips

☐ Include a contact.

Include the full name, address, and phone number for the team leader or point of contact, so the journalist will know whom to contact for more information.

☐ Proofread.

If your press release looks sloppy and careless, so will you. This is not the impression you want to portray. In addition, if a press release is well written, sometimes a news organization will print it without rewriting.

☐ Don't fold your press release like a letter.

Fold it so the headline and date are the first things the editor or reporter sees when opening the envelope.

☐ Know who to send it to.

Find out the name of the editor or a reporter who writes for the section in which you want your story to appear. Send the release to that person's attention. Then call a few days later to make sure it was received. Also try to develop a relationship with one reporter from each local news agency who can provide regular coverage for your project.

☐ Only send ONE release to each news organization.

Any duplicate coverage or effort on their part will be blamed on you.

☐ Timing is everything.

Call in advance to find out about deadlines. Even faxing a press release does not guarantee timely coverage. You may benefit from submitting the release early and telling them it is not valid until some later date.

☐ Only include photographs that support the story.

If you have good, 8"x10" black and white glossies, include them with the press release or include the statement, "Photos available upon request." Place photos on top of cardboard when mailing them so they do not bend. Do not tape or paper clip photographs—it can ruin them.

Sample Press Release

City Receives Federal Funds to Acquire Flood-prone Properties

The City of Adversity has received \$3,050,907 in Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) funds from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to implement a property acquisition project. The City also has received \$813,575 from the State Emergency Management Agency.

The HMGP makes grant funds available to local communities for the purpose of mitigating, or reducing, the risks of future natural disasters. One form of mitigation is property acquisition, which removes people from harm's way forever.

FEMA provides 75 percent of the funds for HMGP-eligible projects. Communities must provide the remaining 25 percent as a local match. Due to the severity of the recent Quake River flood, the State is providing 20 percent of the local match. Adversity will use \$203,394 of its Community Development Block Grant funds for the remaining 5 percent.

The money will be used to purchase about 50 properties that suffer repetitive flooding, enabling homeowners to move out of flood-prone areas. The City will acquire title to the properties, clear the land, and maintain it as open space as required by law. A community-based workgroup will study possible ways to use the properties.

When he learned that Adversity would receive funds, Mayor Timothy Tide said, "I am overjoyed. I already feel a sense of peace of mind that comes with knowing that 50 of our friends and families will be out of harm's way the next time the Quake floods. And, we all know, it will flood again."

Taylor Gilmour, Director of City Services, who is overseeing the project, said that a town meeting would be held as soon as a location is found, and negotiations with property owners will begin immediately thereafter. Properties will be purchased only from property owners who want to sell and accept the price offered by the City.

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